

Common Folk Oral History Collection
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Name: Khenrab [Tib. mkhyen rab]

Gender: Male

Age: 60

Date of Birth: 1940

Abstract

Khenrab was the illegitimate son of a trenyog in Panam County (in Tsang) who became a monk and then a communist activist/official. In this interview, he discusses how at age seven he entered the Shalu Monastery as a monk and how he had to work for his gegen. After the Tibetan revolt of 1959, political education sessions were held in the monastery and the interviewee describes how they were taught to hold struggle sessions. He also describes in detail how he was allowed to leave the monastery and his return home. He discusses the details of his family receiving land during "democratic reforms," and the adjustments he had to make as he became a farmer. He also describes in detail how the Mutual Aid Team system began.

Tape 1

Q: Where were you when the uprising (of 1959) began?

A: During the old society, before democratic reforms began, I was a monk.

Q: What monastery were you in?

A: I was in Shalu [Tib. zha lu] Monastery.

Q: How did you come to enter the monastery?

A: Originally, my mother was a trenyog for the Landlord (ngadag) Samling [Tib. bsam gling]. I was born in 1940 to her as the illegitimate child of Sonam Tobgye [Tib. bsod nams stobs rgyas], the son of the Samling family who was living [mainly] in Lhasa.

Q: What did the term trenyog mean? What work did they have to do?

A: Trenyog were servants of the kudrak. They had to live permanently in the lord's house and performed all sorts of tasks such as sweeping and cooking. They were different from the miser of the lord who had to pay corvée taxes and lived in their own houses. Female trenyog had to work in such a manner [sweeping, cooking], but if one was a male trenyog one had to do other kinds of work, like being a muleteer or being the simpön [personal servant of the (male) master of the house]. My mother was a shendama of Sonam Tobgye's mother.

Q: How were those female trenyog and simpön chosen?

A: They chose the brighter or more able ones among the people in the düjung households [who belonged to that lord]. Individual efficiency in performing tasks mattered in this case. Likewise, in the treba households, the brightest among the five to six children in a family [might be] chosen for the position.

Q: Those households were the treba, right?

A: Yes, after choosing them, a few of them would be taught writing and reading. Otherwise, there wouldn't be any chance for these kids to go to school. From those who did well, some would be granted the job of chandzö and nyerpa in the house itself. Apart from the trenyog who held such positions, the others just did minor manual labor jobs.

All of them received a salary from the family and lived in the family's house permanently. Hence my mother lived in the lord's house permanently. Actually, my mother had a small room outside the estate where she arranged for her old mother to live in. She was supporting her with her own salary. Later, while she was doing her work well and living in the lord's house permanently, she got pregnant with me. The father was the lord's son, Sonam Tobgye. Because I was an illegitimate child and there was the difference in status, it was shameful to the lord's family because at that time the lord's son was not married. But on our side, we didn't care about that. Although the lord's son himself didn't take care of me at all, his mother, who was known as Samling Yum [Samling's mother] took good care of me and sent me to become a monk when I was more grown up.

Q: How old were you when you were sent to Shalu Monastery?

A: I was seven. I was still very young.

Q: How was your life in the monastery?

A: At first a gegen was found for me to live with. He had a high position in the monastery. I didn't do much learning and in one sense I was just like the trenyog in the village, since I had to perform tasks like sweeping, cleaning, etc. all the time [in our apartment]. Every kind of job suitable for my age would be given to me to be done.

Q: What was it like when you first went to the monastery and what is your memory of it? Were you afraid or happy?

A: At the time, there wasn't any special feeling or any joy. In the beginning, I had to learn to recite scriptures in order to attain the first ordination as a monk, and I had a very hard time. I was beaten a lot during that time. I probably didn't have a good memory.

Q: Who actually brought you to the monastery?

A: One of my maternal uncles who was working as a muleteer brought me to the monastery riding his horse. We sought permission from the ngadag. I knew the gegen where I was brought to because he was in the lord's house at that time performing religious rituals. Normally, there was one monk from Shalu Monastery who performed rituals upstairs in the manor house and there was another one from the Thegcholing [Tib. theg mchog gling] Monastery in Gyantse County who worked in the protector-deity chapel [Tib. mgon khang] downstairs. Both of these monks were doing rituals in the lord's manor house for the whole year.

Hence the gegen was familiar to me and I was taken to him. Actually, one of the sons of the lord's family was a trülku in Tashilhunpo. One of my grandfathers was residing in Tashilhunpo in a place called "Tenge" [Tib. steng dge ?]. He was one of the Ngagchen [Tib. sngags chen] [a position in the monastery]. And of course, people like them were from big families and I was just a kid from a poor family, so they sent me to Shalu Monastery with the hope that I would be happier in that monastery. Otherwise, if I were sent to Tashilhunpo they would make me work and suffer because that was a big (monk) household [Tib. shag tshang]. Actually, I was young and I didn't know anything, but I heard later from people about that.

Q: So you were not sent to Shigatse in order to avoid suffering from work, etc.?

A: Yes. In the presence of the lama, of course, there wouldn't have been any problem, but when he was not there, there were many other members of the monastic shagtsang household and the lama's servants could be very strict and harsh.

Q: What were the things that you remember clearest as happening to you personally while you were in the monastery?

A: I was sort of offered to my gegen as a servant. In that shagtsang there was another pupil who was related to the gegen who was older than me. Altogether, I stayed with them until the age of nineteen. During that time I had to go through the recitation exam. If I could not pass the exam, I would not get admitted into the monastery. For the purpose of passing the exam, I was learning [memorizing] the scriptures. Otherwise, there wasn't much learning of scriptures. We were like servants.

At that time, I was just a kid, so I would feel happier to work than study scripture and get beaten (for not memorizing it well). Actually, if I didn't learn the scriptures, I would not get any [good] result for the future. I was living like that until the democratic reforms [answer not finished].

Q: What was the difference between life in the monastery and the village?

A: Apart from the beatings that I got from my teacher, while living in the monastery I didn't need to worry much for my livelihood. However, if I was with my mother in the village, my livelihood condition would have been very poor as she had to support me and my grandmother by her own work as a servant. Nevertheless, for me I would have loved to stay with my mother rather than in the monastery.

Q: Why?

A: There were too many beatings in the monastery. My gegen was very strict and very harsh. He was so hard and aggressive that I would be hit on the head often for minor offenses like the amount of tea poured in his bowl, etc. When I was small, my head was full of scars from his beatings.

Q: With what objects would you be hit?

A: Whatever he could grab with his hand.

Q: Did you sustain any serious injuries from such beatings. For example, so that you were unable to carry on your recitations?

A: No, no such thing happened. But if I didn't return quickly when I was on an errand, I would then be scolded and beaten.

Q: Did you feel proud of being a monk at the time?

A: No, I didn't have any special thoughts apart from keeping myself sufficiently fed. Occasionally, when my gegen went outside to some other monk's house, he would lock the house so I would not get food.

Q: Comparing your life with that of the common people like the düjung, what did you think of your life as a monk?

A: In the monastery kids like me were mostly poor.

Q: What about the ones outside the monastery? I mean the people who lived outside the monastery.

A: Looked at from the outside, just being a monk would be considered very fortunate. But inside the monastery, it was like the proverb, "As for happiness, there is none [coming from] doing the dharma. As for suffering, the lamas afflict it [Tib. skyid po chos la mi 'dug/ sdug po bla mas gtong gis]." So that is an old saying and my condition at the time fit with the saying. [Note- this could have two meanings. Either that lamas beat kid monks when studying, or that lamas make doing religion not fun as they make the students do all sorts of tasks like thousands of prostrations, etc.]

Q: Did you have any close friends while you were a monk?

A: No. During my childhood, I didn't have any friends in the monastery.

Q: Why not?

A: Regulations in monastery were very strict and my gegen would keep me in our apartment [shag] most of the time. There wasn't any leisure time when I could go out and play. If my gegen saw me playing with other boy monks when he was out he would scold me. Later my gegen would lock me inside if he went out. On such occasions he would give me an assignment to memorize some amount of scriptural texts and I would be told that I should be able to recite these from memory when he came back. But normally I would be distracted or somehow would fail to recite them and he would beat me.

Q: Looking back to that time, would you have been happier in the village or in the monastery?

A: Right now, I don't feel that I accomplished anything while I was in the monastery. Yet a sad thing happened. My gegen passed away just before the Tibetan uprising in 1959. Also, that other pupil of his who was his relative and who was very learned in textual scriptures, lost his celibacy. He had met a woman two or three [years] before the uprising.

Q: How did he meet the woman?

A: I don't have any idea. Actually, he was very good at learning scriptures.

Q: How many pupils did your gegen have?

A: Only the two of us. Me and his relative.

Q: Then what happened to the teacher? Was he angry about that? Did he beat him up?

A: Of course he was very angry at that, but it was too late. Hence I was left alone with him. And since I was given to the gegen, I had to live together with him like a family.

My gegen's home was in the Shalu area. They were a treba household. Usually he didn't get along well with his family and he and his family members were not close. There might be other relatives of his also. Then when my gegen passed away, it was during the time of democratic reforms. I was left alone. I went to his relatives and family members to tell the news of his passing away. The members from his family and his ex-pupil came to the apartment and drove me out into a smaller room. They gave me my own bedding, twelve to thirteen dongpa of tsamba, my clothing and a rug, and made me move out. Apart from these belongings, they took everything.

They performed all the rituals for the deceased. And as I was too small, they bullied me, although they didn't have any rights over his belongings or other things. I was the only rightful person living with him together in the shag [monastic household]. But, I was young without anyone such as a relative or friend to back me up, so I couldn't do anything.

Q: Were you sad about your gegen's death?

A: No. I didn't feel any sadness.

Q: Why? Was it because you were often beaten by him?

A: Yes, that was it. While he was alive, he would often beat me.

Q: What would be the daily routine while you were with him?

A: First I would have to get up very early.

Q: How early was that?

A: At dawn. I had to make a fire and boil tea. Before that I had to sweep the altar and the whole apartment. After making tea I would do the water offering on the altar. Then when the sun was about to rise, I had to serve tea. I would be given one or two cups

of tea. Then we would eat our own breakfast. Then the gegen would keep praying.

Q: What would you be given as food?

A: I had to eat from my own food. His food was different.

Q: Who would cook for him?

A: I had to. He would tell me what to make for him. Though I was not grown up, I was very able regarding those tasks. In this way, breakfast would be finished. Then I would prepare tea for the day. After that, I would be told to recite scriptures. However, most of the time would be used up for work instead of studying scriptures. For me, studying scriptures was more trouble than working.

Q: What about lunch?

A: Yes, when noon approached, I needed to cook lunch. Likewise, dinner when evening approached. Then in the evening, I would be told to sweep the apartment again and spray water on the floor. And I had to fetch water to fill up the big water container [Tib. chu rom].

Q: When did you go to bed?

A: At night my gegen would stay up very late reciting scriptures. So I didn't have any choice but to stay up [with] him, though I would fall asleep while sitting up. I could only go to bed after the gegen went to bed.

Q: In between this, would you be kept inside or allowed to walk around and talk to other monks in the monastery?

A: No, we weren't allowed to go outside. Only when I went to fetch water. Even when fetching water I couldn't stay out for long if I met someone to talk with. If I did, then I would be scolded and beaten, and questioned about what kept me that long.

Q: Who supplied your food in monastery?

A: Initially my food was brought from my home in the village. But later the gegen himself provided me food, so there wasn't anything from my home, except for some homemade cookies [Tib. kha zas]. And after becoming a monk, there would be salary from the monastery itself.

Q: How much would the salary be?

A: It was six khe of grain. That was the largest amount we received in a year. We received it little by little over the year.

Q: Would you be given alms?

A: There weren't any alms for me. But in the case of my gegen, the monastery provided a share of land from the monastery's estates [Tib. chos gzhis]. That plot of land was cultivated by his relatives or acquaintances in the village. The cultivator, after keeping the hay from the field, would bring the grain yield to my gegen. My gegen would not weigh or try to find out the exact yield from his own field. He would accept whatever they brought him. In this way, for him there wasn't anything to worry about regarding food. But for me, there wasn't sufficient food to eat, especially when he was out and the storeroom was locked.

Q: Had you thought of running away from the monastery?

A: Yes, I actually did run away several times. When this happened, it was not due to food but rather it was mostly because something had broken and I was afraid to return to the apartment since I knew I would get a beating. For example, when a handle for the water bucket got broken while I was fetching water. When I was small, I had been to Shigatse several times, and also to Jak [Tib. lcags] and Panam. But I didn't dare to run further than these places toward home as I feared I would be taken back immediately.

Q: How come you had to return from those places?

A: There were other monks sent after me to catch me.

Q: How old were you then?

A: About ten or eleven.

Q: What was the longest time you ran away [for]?

A: It was when I ran to a place called Jak by crossing the mountain in the back of Shalu Monastery. I was barefoot when I worked, so when I ran away I was barefoot also. It must have been summer. I stayed in a villager's home herding their sheep for seven days.

Q: Why did you run away that time?

A: I ran away because I had broken something and I thought that if I returned I would be beaten.

Q: That time you had worked for a family as a shepherd, but what would you have to do about your food at other times?

A: I had to beg for food on the way. When I was small, there would be a lot of people who would give food to a small monk.

Q: Would you be in monks' robes?

A: Yes, I was in my monk's robe. Sometimes I would be barefoot and sometimes I would have my boots on.

Q: What about sleeping places at night?

A: There would be families who would pity me and keep me for a night. There were a lot of travelers who would feed me, calling me small "runaway monk," thönbo [Tib. thon po ba], and they quietly gave me clean food, unlike others who begged. They would treat me exceptionally well.

Q: What would you tell the people whom you met when you ran away?

A: They would normally instantly know I was a runaway monk. There used to be lot of such runaway monks at the time. There were runaway monks from Tashilhunpo and other monasteries. Sometimes, there would be runaway monks traveling in pairs or groups.

Q: How did those sent to catch you find you?

A: They would ask people on the way if they had seen a monk like such and such. And normally after collecting information on the way they would track me down. When I ran to Jak, they were not able to track me down for seven days.

Q: Finally, how did they find you?

A: After seven days the monk catchers came to the place and found me.

Q: What did you tell the catchers?

A: Nothing. After they caught me I cried immediately as I was afraid of getting beaten.

Q: Were you beaten that time?

A: No. I didn't get a beating that time as I cried immediately. Other times they would. But luckily I was not beaten that time. I had to beg them to say good things to my gegen so that I won't be punished so seriously.

Q: Did you tell the monks that you didn't want to return then?

A: No, because it was of no use.

Q: Were you happy while you worked as shepherd for the family for seven days?

A: Yes, I was happy. I was well-fed during those few days. The family I stayed with was a lone family without neighbors nearby. In the beginning, they urged me to go back, but when I didn't agree, they agreed to keep me and let me herd their sheep.

Q: What about shoes?

A: I wore their shoes. They gave me a pair as I didn't have any. But the shoes were not the style monks wear.

Q: What about the time you escaped to Panam and Shigatse?

A: In Panam, I was with another small monk who I met on the way. That time it was worse than the other times. Though we got food on the way, we were caught together by the monk catchers who were following the other monk. They accused me of leading the other monk astray and beat me a lot. They were whipping me the whole way back. The two of us were bound together, one's left hand was tied to the other's right hand and we were whipped along the way.

Q: How old were you then?

A: I was only about twelve.

Q: What happened that time so you had to run away?

A: The reason for my running away was that I accidentally broke something in our apartment that was valuable. Whenever something was broken, the gegen would come to beat me. So I feared I would be beaten and I ran outside. Then I wouldn't dare to [go] back to apartment, so I ended up running away from the monastery. But later, as the gegen got smarter, he would always lock the door whenever I tried to run away. A few times I was able to manage to run away as my gegen couldn't call other young monks quick enough to stop me from running. Mostly I would be stopped by other monks my gegen called to stop me and bind me.

Q: When you were caught and returned after running away, would your gegen ask the reason for your running away, etc?

A: There wouldn't be any time for an explanation of such things. I would be just beaten immediately after I returned. When I was small, they would just seize me and beat me. But later when I was grown up and stronger, I would be first bound to a pillar and then whipped. I would be tied facing the pillar with ropes on the upper and lower parts of my body. Then I would be whipped on my buttocks.

Q: Did such beatings happen to you often?

A: Yes, very often. But later, as time went on, and I got older, my gegen would just let me stay freely. He would pretend to ignore

my mistakes, etc. However, at certain points when my mistakes were unbearable to him, monks from other apartments would be called to whip me as he couldn't himself tie and beat me, for he was too weak at those times.

First, without notice, he would send me on to take some messages. While I was outside, two other monks would be called there and they would be told that I had to be caught and beaten a little. When I returned and gave the message to my gegen, he would immediately lock the door. The monks wouldn't say anything. When I finished that, he would suddenly say that today you will be punished as you haven't done well in today's work. Then I would be caught and [they] made me lie face down and they would whip me. One monk would hold my head and one would hold my feet. Then the gegen would whip me.

Q: Did you ever tell your mother of your gegen's ill treatment?

A: No. There was no way to say such things. At that time, there was a saying, "When a precious child gets educated, [he has to undergo] hardships [Tib. gces phrug yon tan slob dus khag]." It was considered better to have such treatment. But in our case, the harsh treatment was not about teaching, but was more about work than education.

Q: Were there any particular aspects in the monastery that made you happy?

A: No. There weren't any, apart from the fact that I learned to write and read. However, when the democratic reforms were launched, I couldn't read and write like the other monks. In the monastery, there was only the recitation of scriptures. I didn't learn anything special.

Q: How old were you when you ran away for the third time to Shigatse?

A: That time I think I was thirteen to fourteen.

Q: How old are you now?

A: Sixty.

Q: What happened then when you were in Shigatse?

A: That time, there were lots of monks from our Shalu Monastery who had homes there. I stayed in one such monk's home. I didn't dare to go up to the Tashilhunpo Monastery itself, because I would be beaten up immediately if I was found there, or I would be taken back to my monastery. I just stayed in the town.

Q: Were you alone from the monastery?

A: Yes, I was. As time passed, I was caught as before. That time when I was in Shigatse, I was caught the next day or the third day after I ran away, since Shigatse was frequented by many who passed through the town.

Q: Did you make a plan before you escaped?

A: No. I wasn't able to plan such things. I only thought of running away as far as possible. Only that was in my mind. Sometimes, it was better when I begged the people who caught me to pity me and give me a lighter punishment. I promised not to run away again. Sometimes, things would be bad, just like the time I was with another kid monk and beaten by the monks who were after that monk.

Q: So what happened after your gegen's death?

A: After his death, his family members took most of the belongings away. Though the property was not large in amount, the ones that were of good quality were all distributed among themselves. They didn't have any close relationship with my gegen when he was alive, so strangely after his death they became the old relatives again. As for myself, I had the right to inherit his share of property, but I didn't have anybody supporting me, so they gave me some tsamba and a little bedding. The rest was taken away by them. And then, my gegen's weekly ritual for his death was done.

Before his forty-ninth day ritual was finished, the Work Team approached the monastery to prepare for democratic reforms. I was about eighteen to nineteen years old. After that, we didn't know about the situation for a couple of days. Then the education session was held, and the policy of "Oppose Three and Exempt Two [Tib. ngo rgol gsum dang chag yang gnyis]" was announced and we were taught about what the terms trenyog and ngadag meant. And we studied about the [status] of the poor monks in the monastery. The relatives of my late gegen had taken all the things that belonged to him except the stove and the churn, etc., the things in the kitchen.

After knowing the content of the education session, I reported [about this] to the Neighborhood Committee. The Party Secretary [Ch. shu ji], or the director, [Ch. zhuren] was a Chinese and there were many interpreters. I told them through the interpreter about my late gegen. Later I heard that if my gegen was alive, he would be classified among the high classes. I told them that I was from the Mag [Tib. mag] area and that my parents had given me to the gegen and after my gegen's death, since I was small, I called the relatives of my gegen, and the relatives and family members of the gegen divided the things among them and they had driven me out of the shag when he died instead of helping me.

I also told them that I didn't have any tsamba, as there was none left. The Neighborhood Committee then agreed with my suggestion to have me live in my late gegen's shag [apartment] and they asked me whether there was anything in the apartment. I told them that until the death ceremony on the forty-ninth day was performed, there was a small amount of things left to be used for that ceremony and then the relatives would divide the things among them. Then I was told that if any relatives came, I should not let them into the house, and I should tell them to come before the Neighborhood Committee. In the end, no one from their [his

gegen's) family came. Consequently, I was able to take the remaining furniture and articles for myself. But there wasn't any tsamba left. The Neighborhood Committee (therefore) provided me tsamba from Risur Rimpoche's house, which was a big family. The amount of tsamba was about half of a cotton bag. After that, I stayed in the education session for just a month.

Q: How many monks were there in your monastery then?

A: About 500. After the Work Team came to Shalu Monastery, one day the Work Team held a meeting of all monks in the monastery.

Q: Were the monks separated according to their ranks and statuses for attending education sessions?

A: While I was there, the education sessions went on daily. Teams of about ten monks were formed, each having a tsugdrang. First of all, members of the teams, I think all adults, were made to learn to accept the points introduced in the sessions. After about twenty days, the real introduction and the accepting of the existence of ngadag and other classes in the monastery was done.

After that, one day in the big house called Shalu Kushang [Tib. zha lu sku zhang], the tsugdrang called the names of the higher rank monks including Noryön Lama [Tib. nor yon bla ma], who was our lord [Tib. dpon po], the abbot of the monastery, the umdze of the prayer assembly [Tib. tshogs chen dbu mdzad], Surshi [Tib. zur bzhi] Lama and some others, and told them to attend seven to ten days of political study sessions. They were all asked to bring their own mattresses and bedding accompanied by a servant. They stayed in Kushang house. The food had to be provided from their own households. Each of them was kept in a single room. Even though they were told they were attending an education session, in fact, they had been arrested.

Q: Had you heard of the uprising in Lhasa before that or was it just a surprise to see all of these happenings?

A: I heard just that there had been a revolt in Lhasa and that the Tibetans were defeated. We had no telephones at that time. I was staying in Ribug [Tib. ri sbug] Monastery, a branch of our monastery which was quite big. Normally, there would be monks going there for summer, but it was March when I was there and heard that the revolt was quelled. I didn't understand what the revolt meant, apart from knowing that fighting had taken place and the Tibetans' side had lost the battle.

Q: What did you think then? Had you thought of running away or participating in the battle?

A: No. At the time I didn't think of anything.

Q: Didn't you feel scared when you heard that war had taken place?

A: No, I was just thinking that my gegen was still alive so I was the same monk as I used to be. So I couldn't do anything. If my gegen had not been alive and I was alone, I might have done something such as leave the monastery and go to Lhasa. There was one monk who was from the upper part of our village. He entered the monastery after me and was a monk without a gegen. He had gone to Lhasa for the Mönlam Prayer Festival and stayed there. Later he told me the story of the revolt in Lhasa while he was there. He told me about the defeat of the Tibetan side and of the participation of monks from the three great monastic seats in Lhasa in that battle. He also told me about the beginning of democratic reforms and the reform campaign called the "Oppose Three and Exempt Two," though what that campaign really meant was not known to us. So when the Work Team arrived and began to say the same things, I knew that what he had said was accurate. Even through the education session was held, not much was understood by the ordinary monks.

Q: What happened to you after the others mentioned above were separated?

A: We had to continue attending the political study sessions. For the ordinary monks (like me) we had the education sessions every day in place of the prayer assemblies that we held previously. During the day time we were given butter tea and at the night we could go back to our apartments.

Q: What did the education sessions actually consist of? Were you just listening to some lecture or could you ask questions, etc.?

A: Normally, topics were introduced in the morning session and then after the lunch break, we would discuss and study those topics. The person who did this was Chinese. An interpreter would translate what he said to us. We were taught to discuss the topics that had been presented in the morning. Then after an interruption for lunch, which was provided at the place of the class, we would continue our afternoon session after a little break. A topic would be introduced for the afternoon session too. Anyway, the topics were mainly "Oppose Three and Exempt Two" and the "exploitation and oppression by the three big ngadag." We had to discuss these and give the reasons for them, but this was quite hard to understand because there were so many new terms.

Q: Were you surprised to hear those lectures or what did you think at the time?

A: Though I participated in the political study sessions, I always wished that I would be sent home because my tsamba was running out. As for the study session, unlike the older monks who understood things, being young, monks like me didn't understand much. Then just before I left the monastery, a one day struggle session was held against the higher lamas and monastery leaders. Ten days before the struggle session was set to be held, there was a rehearsal of how to do a struggle session. It was very difficult to learn.

Q: How was that training held?

A: The targets of the session included Risur Rimpoche, Shalu Butön [Tib. bu ston] Rimpoche and Getö [Tib. dge stod?] Rimpoche. There were also other monks who had earlier been the Noryön in the monastery. These were announced first. They were meant to be the targets of the first struggle session.

The monks were divided into several small groups. In the group it was said that we would hold the struggle session with this and that person. The group members were sitting in a circle and several tsamba bags were lined in the middle. Each tsamba bag was said to represent one particular higher ranking lama or official. Then every monk had to stand and point at those tsamba bags, and rehearse and practice their accusation dialogues against them.

Q: What kind of dialogues were you made to rehearse at the time? Would there be anyone who would kick the bags?

A: There wasn't any kicking. In the dialogues one would say, "For the past thousand years, you lords were standing on the shoulders of common people and the poor monks, and exploiting and oppressing us. Now under the leadership of the Communist Party, you are in our hands and should be brought down." Actually, there were just a few monks going through the motions of saying the words that we were trained [in saying]. The rest of the people were just watching and keeping quiet. Therefore, it didn't seem very useful.

Q: How did the actual struggle session go?

A: After the training within the small group, we had to practice in a larger meeting together with the majority of monks who were using similar methods. During this time, those monks who were brave and good at speaking were selected from the small groups, and they would rehearse and practice accusation dialogues. I was not selected for this. In the end, the Work Team told us the date of the actual struggle session. At the same time, they said who would speak first and who would be second, and so forth.

Q: Did they put the tsamba bag in the middle?

A: Yes, they put a tsamba bag or some other things. The monks like me were not selected as there were many monks and the older [poor] monks who were eloquent and knew reading and writing were selected. Then one day, a date was chosen by the Work Team and we were told to show what we had trained for. They selected who would speak first, and who would be second, and so forth.

On the day of the actual struggle session, it was held on the stone floor in front of the monastery's general assembly hall. All the monks had to attend it, as did the masses from nearby villages. The moment the higher rank monks and lamas were brought to the front of the meeting by the People's Liberation Army soldiers, one person in the audience started shouting out slogans such as, "We should destroy the reactionaries!" and the audience would raise their fists and respond saying, "Destroy them!" The atmosphere became so tense that I was really scared.

Q: Which of the lamas was this?

A: There were several lamas like Risur Rimpoche and Butön Rimpoche.

Q: How old were they?

A: Risur was in his 70s and Shalu was in his 60s.

Q: Did they know that they were going to hold the struggle session? What was their reaction to the session?

A: They didn't understand what they were going through.

Q: How did they act when they were brought in the meeting?

A: They might have sensed something different was going on and would have been scared as they were surrounded by People's Liberation Army troops. As it was the first experience of a struggle session, they didn't realize that they would be called on by the masses to confess. At that moment, the masses were shouting, "Bend your head down!" Some were not scared and were standing straight and looking at people's faces from the stage. They probably were not familiar with doing this. Some others were confused and looked at the ground. Then the activists came up and seized their necks and yelled, "Why are you still looking down at us the masses? Your time to look down on us is finished. Why are you not looking down?" And they were pressing them down [on their backs] with their hands. Some of them were falling down [when they pressed them down hard like that].

Q: Were the activists monks only doing this or were there villagers also?

A: There were both monks and villagers. It seemed that the masses also had received training, but I didn't know for sure.

Q: What did you feel seeing others acting this way? Was it hard to raise your hand and yell at the lamas who were in the line on the stage?

A: It was a fearsome experience and I was not able to look up at the faces of those lamas. The Noryön was the lord of both monks and lay people, and they were my lords too. They became the lords of this area not through being appointed by others but by their own capabilities. And they were from our own Shalu Monastery, not appointed from other monasteries.

Q: Were the lamas really bad or did they just have bad reputations?

A: When the rehearsal was going on, it seemed that everybody was able to accuse them of something, but when coming face-to-face, it was different. At the actual meeting, even though it was said that it was voluntary for people to stand up and accuse the lamas and leaders, nobody had such courage to stand up and accuse them to their face directly for a certain time.

That seemed to make the people in the Work Team and the teachers of the training sessions very annoyed and they then ordered the people from the [prepared] list to stand up [and speak]. The leader of the Work Team said, "Today, there are hundreds of poor

monks and poor masses who want to criticize and denounce the monastery's leaders. However, since we do not have enough time, we will let only a few people criticize and denounce them." And then he called the name of the first person to accuse them. It took a while for that first person, who was a monk, to stand up from the audience. I thought he must be scared to be the first person to accuse them. The audience had to wait silently for awhile.

When the monk stood up, he looked a little nervous in the beginning and halted for some moments before saying anything as it was the first time for him. Then he calmed down a little bit and started to yell at those lamas to look down. He accused them one by one according to what he had learned in the training sessions. The scene was very strange as he was accusing no one in particular for he couldn't make out who was who. Then, step by step, he made accusations according to the history of each target person.

Some of the lamas still looked up and tried to see who that monk was. I guess they still did not realize how serious the situation was. The person who was the lord Noryön was beaten severely by the monks, much worse than the others. I think that that was because he had the power to bully people in the past, so people now used this opportunity to get their revenge. After accusing each one of them, the first monk concluded his speech by saying that, "Now I would like to stop my speech here because there are many others who also want to accuse them." He was one of the most verbal of those in the training sessions.

After this monk, one young village girl whose name was called by the Work Team stood up. She probably was an activist. I think she was from the upper Shalu area. The girl was very verbal and harsh during the session. She accused each of the targets of a lot of things. Sometimes when she got angry, she put her knee on the head of the Noryön to force him to bend over. Sometimes while she was speaking, both her hands grabbed the lamas' upper shawl [Tib. gzan]. Some of lamas' clothing was torn to pieces. By this time, those lamas realized what a struggle session meant. And all of them were very scared.

After the woman, there was a long break when no one went up to the stage. As the time passed, the leader of the Work Team must have felt that no one would stand up to make accusations so he then announced, "Today, the struggle session will be stopped here. From now on we must struggle against these lords month by month and year by year until they are completely destroyed." And then the People's Liberation Army soldiers took all the lamas back.

It seemed that the monastery leader, the Noryön got very frightened by the session and what happened to him that day. He not only was beaten a lot, but his shawl was torn to pieces. He must have been very scared by this struggle session. I saw his monk-clothing was torn to pieces at the meeting. On the morning of next day, I heard some people yelling outside that someone had jumped from a building. I went outside to see who that person was and I saw the Noryön laying on the stone-paved ground. He had not died yet and was still breathing weakly when I got there. After a moment, he stopped breathing and died. He had jumped from the fourth floor of the building through a glass window, so that day all the lamas were moved to the first floor of the building. They did not receive any further struggle sessions and then they were all transported to a prison in Shigatse.

Q: Did he commit suicide?

A: Yes, and because of that, the other lamas were all moved on the same day to the Karkhang [Tib. bkar khang] Prison in the fort of Shigatse. After that, the lamas didn't receive any more struggle sessions. And shortly after that, the young monks were allowed to leave the monastery.

Q: How?

A: Shortly after, since I was a young man, the Work Team let me go back to my home village. At the time, the Work Team announced that all monks had the freedom to choose whether to continue to stay in the monastery or to leave the monastery. However, if one remained continuously as a monk and stayed in the monastery, no one would support his livelihood and he would not get a salary as before. However, after finishing the education session, most monks had run out of their tsamba so they had no food to stay in the monastery. Most younger monks were allowed to leave earlier, and the older monks left later.

Q: How old were you then?

A: I was eighteen.

Q: How did you feel about leaving monastery?

A: I was happy because I was in a bad situation then. My share of the apartment's tsamba was not given to me when my gegen died and I didn't have anything to stay back in the monastery for. So I returned home. I left the monastery at age eighteen. I was really happy about that because when I was in the monastery I suffered lots and since my gegen had died, there was no one that I could depend on. When I was going to return to my village, it was said that we could not wear monks' clothing anymore. I took off the monks' upper shawl and one of my monk friends gave me a shabby Tibetan (laymen's) chupa. Although its color was a little reddish, it was good enough to wear outside and was different from the ordinary monks' clothing. My village was located on the other side of a mountain, so I climbed the mountain and went back home.

When I arrived in my home, the people in the village were also having political study sessions every day. For this reason, my mother did not say anything about my returning. Since I had already experienced a much stricter education session in the monastery, I did not find the village's education session hard. This time I felt comfortable as I understood the new terms and new ideas.

Q: Were you in monks' robes when you returned?

A: They told us that we were not allowed to leave wearing monk robes. But then I didn't have any laymen's clothing to wear. So I took off the outer monks' shawl and wore a shabby Tibetan chupa which a monk friend gave me. This chupa was left there as a

pawn. Though the chupa was a little reddish (it was okay). So I returned wearing that.

Q: Did you walk back to your home?

A: Yes. I crossed the mountain on foot. After seven to eight days of travel, I got there. Then I took two donkeys and returned to the monastery to carry my remaining things back home.

Q: What did your mother tell you when you returned home?

A: Not much, as the situation was understandable (to her) since the campaign of the "Oppose Three and Exempt Two" was going on there actively. When I returned, I found out that the variety of food consumed in my family was better than before. They had as much food as they wanted. Apart from the study sessions, there was sufficient food provided by the Work Team after the daily work was done. In this way, most of the young men who were muleteers and others had a very good time as there was plenty of chang to drink every day. They got drunk every night.

Q: Where was the chang made?

A: There was a place in the ngadag's house where the chang was made. Unlike then, the ones who took charge of making chang in the old society had to follow the rules of providing the serfs with chang. There was a limit on the amount to be served in the morning and evening. But when I returned while the study sessions were being held, there wasn't any limit at all. All were given as much chang as they wanted so that most people would be drunk at night. During that time, the only member of the ngadag's family who was there was the mother. She and two stewards were living in the ngadag's home. The father was in Panam County working to establish the County Administration Office. He later took the position of xian zhang.

Q: What jobs did you do after returning from the monastery?

A: In the beginning, I was attending the study sessions. Then when the democratic reforms were launched, land was allocated to us. All the servants who had worked inside the ngadag's house were also given farming equipment and houses/rooms. Hence, my mother, my sister and myself received a small inner room and a two pillar-sized apartment on the third floor of the ngadag's house.

Q: What about a share of land?

A: Each person was allocated two khe and two dre. That amount was given to every person equally.

Q: How many people were there in your family at that time?

A: There were four, as my grandmother was living then. However, she was qualified to receive an apartment as a share... The houses (apartments) were distributed from the Samling family's manor house.

Q: What about cattle?

A: Yes, there were cattle too, including horses and mules. The distribution of all those animals was done by drawing lots. Some people got mules, some got dzo, some got oxen, some got cows and some horses, etc. Then, happily, all the people had their pack animals, though no one had any place to keep the animals and feed them.

So the following day, they rode their horses and mules and went to the Work Team, and they were telling them to take back the horses and the mules. They said, "We can't keep these animals as we don't have any place to keep them nor anything to feed them, and we also can't train these animals." But the Work Team didn't agree to take back the horses and mules and scolded the people. They said, "It is bad of you to disappoint us and not realize the wish of the Party and the goodness of Chairman Mao to distribute all of these. If you don't keep these, who will suffer the loss?"

Q: When was that?

A: It was during 1959. At the time, many of us were not able to do anything as it was difficult to have a place to keep the animals, although we had places for ourselves to stay. Even though the Work Team distributed some places to keep the animals, there should be places for each and every one since it was difficult to keep all the cattle [of several households] grouped together.

Q: How many people in the village received land?

A: Not more than 300-400 people received land shares. The land distributed at that time was only the land belonging to the Samling family. The land of the middle class farmers, the treba households and the rich farmers were retained by them. Actually the treba were the upper-middle class farmers. The poor were the ones who didn't have much land and good houses to live in. The trenyog didn't have any property or place to live, hence they were the ones who received more of the distribution of land and other items than people from the other statuses.

Q: When you returned to the village, had class status already been classified or not?

A: No. Study sessions were being held. During that time, it was quite a chaotic atmosphere with dancing and other such things going hand in hand with the political study sessions.

Q: Were the people who were teaching the study sessions Chinese?

A: The people (leaders) who taught the sessions were all Chinese cadres. There were also quite a lot of young Tibetan interpreters who had studied in China.

Q: Were you happy at the time to receive the land share, etc.?

A: Yes, I was. Initially, as it was said that the time had arrived for us to be owners of our own land, all the people were feeling very happy to take the land share and the cattle. But on the following day, all were returning to the Work Team to take back the animals as everyone was complaining of not having places to keep the cattle and not having hay to feed them. It was very comical to have a family with only a small living quarters trying hard to keep and tie up the huge dzo it was allocated. And some others weren't able to keep the horses they were given. Hence, at that time there were many who wanted the Work Team to take back the cattle they had received. Of course, the Work Team would send the people away giving them a scolding. Later, many sold their animals at a very low cost since they feared they would not find buyers to buy their cattle. Many of the middle class households and treba families were the buyers then, and some households even told the others that "It will be okay if you feed the animals [unfinished]."

Q: Were you sad or happy about the defeat of the Tibetan Government and the replacement of it with the new government of the present time?

A: For me, I didn't feel any different because I was young. But for the elder people, after they heard at the study sessions that they could be the owners of their own land, they became very happy. They were also happy because they were told that they didn't need to perform any more corvée taxes and be serfs anymore. At that time it was considered that the quality of the ngadag's land was better than that held by the other serfs, so those who received land from the lord's land got better yields and many (other) people complained regarding the payment of the "Donation Grain," saying that the ngadag's land was better and their land was worse.

Q: So they were saying that the ngadag's land should pay more and they should pay less of the donation grain, right?

A: Yes.

Q: What was the common people's response to the struggle session against huge numbers of monks in the monastery?

A: It was mostly the older people who saw the struggle sessions against the lamas and all others as very bad. There were many even who became very sad and cried. Of course, it was obviously dangerous to cry and show one's emotions openly, as they would then be criticized by the Work Team. But for younger people, it hardly had any effect. And they were not attentive. As the regulations in the monastery for younger monks no longer existed, the younger ones were actually happier. Otherwise, the elders were more affected as they were more devoted to the lamas.

Q: Did it prove very difficult to farm and do cultivation after all of those years of monastic life?

A: Yes, it did. Of course, first of all, I was inexperienced in cultivation work. Apart from actual farming, there were lots of other manual labor tasks a farmer should master of which I knew nothing. For example, I didn't know how to sew my own shoes and all. But through experience and learning from others, it was better later. In the beginning though, it was difficult for me, even to do a minor task such as putting a saddle on a donkey. At times, I would be made fun of by others when I asked them how to irrigate the fields. They [made fun of me and said] said, "You should irrigate from the lower place to the upper place." Though I was an adult physically, I looked like a complete fool at those times. After some time passed, the Mutual Aid Team was established [Tib. rogs res tshogs chung].

Q: When was that, 1960 or 1961?

A: It probably was 1960. In the Mutual Aid Team, the middle class farmer households, of which there were not many, were divided among the teams so that they could be the foundation of the team because they had a lot of land, farming equipment and cattle. To one of these middle class households, eight or nine poor farmers' households were attached to form a team. In this way, the formation of Mutual Aid Teams happened. And each team was labeled by numbers like the First Team, the Second Team and so forth. So each of the teams would be assigned jobs that should be done collectively.